

FALL 2013

home design real estate

nest

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**The nights are cooler,
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think "indoors."**

This issue of *Nest* takes you inside luxury homes, the one-of-a-kind Vermont Earth House and a new home decor store. All this and more in *Seven Days'* quarterly supplement about home design and real estate.

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Bob Chappell's Vermont Earth House in Marshfield. Photo by Jeff Willard-Brodur.

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Out of the Box

Bob Chappelle's domed home is a natural wonder

BY AMY LILLY — PHOTOS BY JEE WALLACE-ERDOUR

In the woods along Hollister Hill Road in Marshfield is a handmade house that has to be seen to be believed. Fantastical and bohhit worthy, it's a series of connected domes and arching vaults, the tallest of which is two stories high. The nonlinear forms are made from polystyrene, coated inside and out with a mixture of mud and cement. Frameless oval windows are set directly into the walls. Inside, hand-built cherry-ala furniture and towering clusters of granite columns help create a living space that's every inch a work of art.



Above: View of the woodland with all Vermont Greenhouse fabric from a wooden fence line (PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLY)

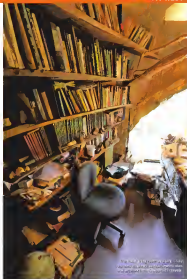
Right: Bob Chappelle, 82, looking at his home in 1988

The maker of the so-called Vermont Earth House, Bob Chappelle, is now 95. He was an inexperienced homesteader when he began building it in 1986. Chappelle had degrees in mechanical engineering and architecture — the latter from the University of Pennsylvania in 1948. Once, at an award ceremony, he met a cantankerous Frank Lloyd Wright, who complained that the models weren't well made.

Chappelle ran his own firm in Philadelphia, Chappelle & Cothens,

and he parted ways with his partner and moved to Vermont. Here, he became interested in the world's most basic building material: earth. His fascination was based on travels he had taken around the world — “from the icebound North to the Cape,” as Chappelle put it — and especially in Africa. He began experimenting with the viability of mud in northern climates on the 67-acre plot he bought in Marshfield.

MY NEST



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Out of the Box

Speaking to a group of preservationists gathered for a tour of his home in August, Chappelle recalled so initial building effort that used too little sturdy lumber. "I dumped the whole thing in the woods," said Chappelle, who leans on a cane but is otherwise mobile, sharp and cheerful.

When he finally found the right seal mix, he built the rambling polypropylene core up from bedrock, applied the mud and coated the exterior with two different waterproofing substances. Those have since begun to fail, and some of the mud is crumbling as a result of water damage.

This problem is what gave rise to the now, organized by Vermont state architectural historian Devin Calahan. He led a group that included Lisa Ryan from the Preservation Trust of Vermont, James Duggan from the state's Division for Historic Preservation and Helen Whyte of

the Vermont Advisory Council on Historic Preservation — the body that evaluates and recommends Vermont sites for the National Register of Historic Places. Not tagged along.

All of the experts agreed the house is worth preserving; the only question was how to waterproof without significantly altering or damaging Chappelle's creation. Chappelle's handworking assistant, Monique Gierber of Whyte Park, whose day job is at High Mowing Organic Seeds, must constantly patch and repair under Chappelle's worried direction.

For the architect himself, preserving the Vermont Earth House would help combat what he considers deeply disturbing building trends that result in lifeless living spaces.

"Our country is so wedded to studs, sheetrock, plywood, plasterboard," Chappelle declared. "All you get is a box." 🍷



David Laundy, Sculpture for Contemporary, 2010

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Settling for More

In Vermont, what does it take for the wealthy to say "good buy"?

BY CAROLYN SHAPIRO

The owner of a major company in Cleveland and his wife flew on his private jet into Burlington International Airport on a recent Sunday to look at some of the state's priciest properties. Their daughter attends Middlebury College, and they've fallen in love with Vermont, says Wade Weathers Jr., who has sold luxury real estate for 35 years. He showed the house seekers a \$3.3 million house in Shelburne with spectacular views of Lake Champlain, a Charlotte home concealed by trees on 800 feet of shoreline, listed at \$2.5 million; and an 11-acre estate, priced at \$1.75 million, on the waterfront in Panton.

Later that day, the executive and his wife flew home to the Midwest. They also have a place in Florida, Weathers says. After working with them for about six months, he hopes they'll soon plant their third flag in the Champlain Valley.

Obviously, these aren't typical buyers. Hence in the "lux" category — listed at \$1 million or more — represented about 1 percent of all Vermont residences sold, agents estimate. In the past 12 months, just 85 of those luxury houses have changed owners across the state. Most are priced between \$1 million and \$2 million, with a few more topping \$3 million, according to statistics from Fear Seaneen Sotheby's International Realty.

Drawing from a small pool of potential purchasers, real estate agents who specialize in the luxe market have honed their insights into the moneyed market. When a customer can fly home anywhere in the world, the competition isn't just another gorgeous house in

the next town. It's a coastal cottage in Maine, a ranch in Montana, a ski chalet in Wyoming, even a villa on the French Riviera.

And Vermont — where property taxes are as steep as the green hills — can be a tough sell. The most expensive houses may seem like bargains compared with similar properties in more popular destinations, but some buyers still balk at the additional annual expense.

"[For] most of our buyers, this is less than 1 to 2 percent of their holdings, but they still don't want to overpay," says Averil Cook, one of Weathers' colleagues at LandVest, a Boston-based company affiliated with Christie's International Real Estate.

"It's a buyers' market," agrees Kathy O'Brien, an agent with Fear Seaneen Sotheby's.

These agents must be quick with information that never gets by. Big-money buyers take their time. They



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The average time it takes to sell a home in this category is 18 to 24 months, compared with less than a year for less-expensive homes, the agents say. Even in boom times, these properties would take nine months to sell, Westers says.

The recession hit the second-home market hard. In 2009, O'Brien's sales dropped 50 percent, forcing her to "reset" herself and sell across the price spectrum, she notes. Her current listings range from a \$5 million five-bedroom house in Shelburne to a \$250,000 condo in Burlington's South End.

Sales bottomed out in 2010 and are still recovering, Westers says. "We have fewer buyers in the market, and we have this overabundance of inventory. And that depresses prices."

About 65 to 70 percent of Westers' and O'Brien's sales come from out-of-state buyers. Brian Boardman, another high-end agent and an owner of Coldwell Banker Hudson & Boardman

Realty in Burlington, lists more homes close to the city and sells to locals about half the time.

All of these agents in Vermont, though, see a certain type of high-end buyer. He or she is usually 50 to 60 years old, either late in a lucrative career or retired early. Those who are

VERMONT — WHERE PROPERTY TAXES ARE AS STEEP AS THE GREEN HILLS — CAN BE A TOUGH SELL.

younger and still working typically own their businesses, telecommute or travel enough to live anywhere.

The out-of-staters often have a connection to Vermont — they attended the University of Vermont or another local school, or they currently have a kid in college here. They may have made their fortune in Manhattan or Boston "and always dreamed of coming back," Boardman says.

Some buyers fantasize about owning an old "gentleman farm" in Vermont's rolling hills, or a spot near the slopes. Ski areas have held their value pretty



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Settling for More

Well since the recession, Weather's says, (An 8,000-square-foot chalet in Stone is one of the most expensive homes for sale in the state, listed at \$12.5 million.) Most who have the money, though, want to sit beside the lake while they sip their morning coffee.

That's where a local agent's expertise in water depth, cliff drops, mooring spots and sandy beaches comes into play. Bandman says. He knows, for example, that the custom-designed boathouse with a rooftop deck at a \$2.18 million home on Burlington's Oakledge Drive is unique on Lake Champlain, where rough water can damage such a structure.

"At this price point, what people are expecting is an incredible view," O'Brien says. "Then privacy, I think, is No. 2. And right up there with privacy is the style of the house. People are so focused on having light and open floor plans."

Some recent million-dollar-plus listings near Burlington boast a rooftop pool, a complete home theater system, or an all-season porch with unique glass panels and two large fireplaces. Guest master bedrooms have fallen out of favor, O'Brien notes, replaced

in some houses by coverings, stone-enclosed showers.

But some of today's high-end buyers tend to opt for smaller footprints rather than sprawling, 15,000-square-foot estates, she adds. And they care more about energy efficiency and smart technology.

A home that O'Brien has listed for \$1.8 million in South Hero welcomes would-be buyers with three solar panels out front. At the Oakledge Drive property with the boathouse, the seller who built it — he's an engineer who owned a local metal fabrication company — ran radiant heat tubing through the floor on both levels.

"The new buyer wants convenience," Weather's says. "They want it to be simple. They don't have time to make those changes, or they don't want to take the time to make those changes."

Discipline is also key for high-end buyers — both during the home shopping process and after move-in. Many of the priciest properties sit at the ends of dirt roads or long, private driveways. They rarely have "for sale" signs.

High-end agents never ask what a buyer does for a living or probe for financial information. Really rich folks rarely

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meat their net worth. On the contrary, they sit atop on weekends like any other home buyers, dressed in jeans, T-shirts and flip-flops. They aren't carrying Louis Vuitton bags, O'Brien says.

Even if some of her buyers fly in on private planes, the agent describes them as "humble, very down-to-earth" people who embrace Vermont for its lack of ostentation, unspoiled landscape and laid-back attitude. They appreciate the state's billboard prohibition and environmental protection, she says.

O'Brien recently showed homes to a Chicago couple in their early thirties who still do triathlons and like the idea of taking the Green Mountain State. "They love the beauty of what Lake Champlain is," she says.

Around Glendon's County, Boardman says, he can also pick the proximity to cultural amenities. Top-notch health care at University of Vermont Medical Center, a convenient airport and farm-to-table cuisine making that is among big cities.

"Most people in this price range are sophisticated," Boardman notes. "They want to be close to the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts. They want to be close to the airport. They travel a lot."

The downside is the taxes — even for the well-heeled.

Before the recession, few buyers cared, O'Brien says. "People were just spending money. Now they watch where their money goes. I don't care how much you're making. Everybody's doing that."

Wardham says taxes killed a deal he started with a New Jersey man who planned to swap a house in New York's Hamptons for a place in Shelburne. Then the man learned that his taxes on the Shelburne house, listed at just under \$4 million, would ultimately add \$50,000 a year to his expenses — about twice the bill for his Hamptons house.

"You can buy in Maine. You can buy in Rhode Island. You can buy in Massachusetts. You can buy in lots of places where taxes are cheaper than they are in Vermont," Wardham laments.

But one of O'Brien's potential buyers, a CEO from Connecticut, recently told her, "I don't mind paying the property taxes, because I know where my money is going in Vermont."

For those who hate the debt and really love this state, it turns out, money is no object. [Twitter](#)

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House Hunt!

Following first-time home buyers in search of their dream homes

BY CAROLYN FOX

If you've been through the process, you know there's a learning curve, complete with near misses, drama and mystifying paperwork along the way. If you're starting to think about getting out of that rental and buying your own home, our House Hunters just might have some eye-opening tips for you. Think of it as a reality show, but in print.

Meet the Farnens: our newest wannabe homeowners. Ashley and Dan Farnen, both 29, currently live in South Burlington with their 1-year-old daughter Ana, and 4-year-old dog Lucy. Ashley's a stay-at-home mom and daycare provider and Dan is a Mr. Fix-It type who works at Lowe's. The couple's fourth-floor rental apartment is losing its luster — fast.

On top of the daily frustrations of navigating the stairs or elevator with a young baby and all other gear, "Our rent is ridiculously high," says Ashley. "It's a great, awesome place, but we want to think about the future. We're not really building any equity. We're ready for an actual home where we can rent, decorate and have a yard." And they'd like to move in soon. Their rent is rising in October, so the Farnens hope to relocate before December.

That said, they are keeping their expectations in check. "The market in Vermont is not ideal," Ashley acknowledges. "It's terribly difficult. We're trying to be realistic and know that our dream home is not really on the table, with our budget right now."

So the Farnens are on the hunt for a \$200,000+ starter house — a two- to three-bedroom first upper with "good bones" that landscaper Dan can whip into shape. "We try to be pretty open-minded," says Ashley. "We watch a lot of HGTV, so we always try to think about what they would do."



PHOTO: JAMES MURPHY

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But the home has to have easy access to the bus route (they only have one car) and proximity to a good school. They're targeting a wide area: Williston, South Burlington, Essex and Shelburne.

"I can't even begin to tell you how many places we've looked at," says Ashley. "Homes are getting bought up super quickly." Even when they view a home the day after it's posted on the market, it will often already have several offers and be in a bidding war, she explains.

Lesson No. 1 of house hunting? "Be patient," says Ashley, "even though it is incredibly hard."

And Lesson No. 2? "You really have to find a real estate agent you can trust, that will look out for [you], that won't try to sell [you] anything," she suggests. The Farnens are working with Patrick O'Connell of Real Solutions Realty's Intergroup Realty. He's married to one of Ashley's high school friends.

"Our real estate agent is fantastic," Ashley enthuses. "There are so many intricate processes, his appraisal and escrow and all of these words I don't even really know. Our real estate agent recommended all these great people to help us through the process, [because] it's definitely a little scary."

While the Farnens hope to start their home life in a house with a basement, their present: \$250 to Southern Supply in Burlington or Williston.

Where is He Now?

In the corner, we introduced you to House Hunter James G. of Burlington. A 28-year-old with a wife and two kids, James is looking for a duplex in Burlington, South Burlington or Williston.



In the year that he's been working with John Galloway of Coldwell Banker House & Business Realty, James has had in two offers — one with a low interest rate. "I'm doing everything just right in looking for the place," says James. "I've been accepted for the offer. But I'm not sure if I'm authorized to do that — for \$150,000 more. That's not a bad offer," says James.

So as he struggles to find the right home, he's searching for a house with a lot, "a big price range, it's not a bad idea," he says. "I'm not sure if I'm authorized to do that — for \$150,000 more. That's not a bad offer," says James.

Finally, says James, "I'm not in a rush. We just want the right opportunity to go to be the right thing and the right moment."

"We know what they say," says James. "We know what they say," says James.

When James, 28, is in the market for a house, he's looking for a duplex in Burlington, South Burlington or Williston. He's looking for a duplex in Burlington, South Burlington or Williston. He's looking for a duplex in Burlington, South Burlington or Williston.



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Domestic Goods

Common Deer leaps into Burlington

BY MOLLY WALSH

Sharon Beal appreciates furnishings with a past. So when her husband asked if he should send off the gear marks on an old industrial table destined for his wife's store, Beal told him, "Oh no, keep the gears in there."

The marks are fairly visible atop the tall table, which sits in the bright, 1,500-square-foot Common Deer gift and housewares store at the corner of College Street and South Winslow Avenue in downtown Burlington. The shop opened in mid-July with three times the space Common Deer had in its former location in Shelburne Village, where Beal launched the operation in 2003. Two years later, it was definitely time to grow.

"We were bursting at the seams," Beal says.

Since July 1, when Beal closed the Shelburne shop, she's been busy

outfitting the new one. The space became available after the North Free retail store next door downsized.

Gone are the ski jackets and fleece. Instead, Common Deer displays soft wooden blankets with zigzags or stripes, rustic tables, antique benches and bed frames with crackling paint, doorknob brooches for men or women, handmade leather purses, wooden blanket boxes of all sizes, props for the bar, and leotards for the body. And, yes, deer antlers in various sizes and shapes.



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There's also Beekle & Bean jewelry by Molly Conant of Burlington, beehive crochets and mugs/bowls by Woodstock-based Farmhouse Pottery, and cutting boards by Burlington-based Bowen. Beekle & Bean finds that rustic old things in creative ways, hence her displays include a wooden currier's stool by finished with a vintage leather gun sling by Margaret Jewell, a small company based in Philadelphia.

About 85 percent of Common Door products, whether old or new, were made in the U.S. or Canada. The vibe is informal, rustic and sturdy — no chains in sight. Proprietor tradesmen work in here and there (hand-painted finishing on a stool, lace stenciled with anchors, nautical brackets), but this store does not cater to people named Buffy and Thel.

It feels more like a venue for folks named Ezra and Wilhelmina, where shoppers can buy an old ice auger to hang on the wall (24.95) or repurpose a vintage metal hobbit rack (39.95) to organize garden tools or kitchen utensils.

"It's pretty about what I put in the store," Beekle says. "I feature things that are just a little bit unusual."

For newly made items, she likes small-batch products that fit with her mission to revive manufacturing in the U.S. Sometimes that means getting on the phone with the people who make these boards or picture frames in their basements and convincing them to scale up — without going offshore.

When vendors protest that they can't, Beekle comes back with her trademark line: "Yes, you can."

On a recent day at the store, Beekle is wearing her sun visored hair down at her shoulders and is dressed in slacks, sandals and a loose linen top. She has a confident, sociable manner and a bit of polish — like someone who would entertain the conversation at a dinner party and recognize the pattern of the silver on the table.

Beekle lives in Charlotte with her husband, John, who helps renovate things he finds savings for the store. Both are well-versed in the workings of small business. For more than two decades, they have operated Vermont Business Brokers, which helps people buy and sell a range of small businesses, from retail stores to excavation companies.

Through this work, Beekle has observed numerous small manufacturers

close down in the region. "As business brokers, we see it," she says. "It's very concerning to me, and I think something turning around stay in the USA."

Beekle grew up in Northburgh, NY. Even as a child, she loved hunting for old things. "You go to auctions and antique shows since I was little," she says.

After college, she and her husband worked in her father's auto dealership for more than a decade. When it was time to sell the business, the Beekles moved to Vermont to raise their two children and indulge their love for the outdoors — hiking, biking, mountain biking and especially sailing. "I love Vermont to the max," Beekle says.

With the children grown and Vermont business brokers established, Beekle decided a few years ago that it was time for her own project — Common Door. The name is a play on "common door" — yes, it's used to that family sailing thing — and reflects the store's mission to take something and stamp it with personal style.

"I've always wanted to own a store, always," Beekle notes. "It's been 16 years in the making. My family finally said, 'Just go do it.'"

Along with their dad, Beekle's children have pitched in. Right now, both help out with the company website.

Online sales at commondoor.com are healthy, with customers all over the country, Beekle says.

To feed the customer appetite, Beekle and Common Door manager Lauren Greer often head out at 5 a.m. with a trailer hitched to Beekle's vehicle. They scoop up finds at estate sales, flea markets and antique shows across the region.

Some items go straight to the store, such as the barn-wood door that Beekle set up as a divider at the back of the retail space to carve out an office. Other buys get a little love. These two antique dining room chairs with fresh blue and white ticking in the office? Greer repainted them.

Beekle doesn't buy anything for the store she wouldn't buy for her home. Common Door reflects her personal philosophy about decorating.

"Hiring old, mixing it with new," she says. "It's just nice comfort to the space."

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Home, Eclectic Home

*A decorating diva shares
artful advice that won't
break the bank*

BY SABIE WILLIAMS



Enter Lisa Cowan's Burlington home, and you might think you've walked into an eclectic art gallery. That's not surprising, considering she owned and curated Pine Street Art Works; run Small Equals, an online store from which she sold her ephemera-inspired designs; and was co-owner of the short-lived cooperative gallery Winooski Circle Arts. Oh, and she's an artist herself.

At home as in her professional enterprises, Cowan's taste trends toward the bold — think chevron-print carpets and polka-dot chairs. With her discerning eye for art and vintage collectibles, whimsical sense of humor, and knack for thrifty do-it-yourself projects, she has created unique and welcoming rooms in her two-story house. So if you're bored with beige, take a page out of Cowan's book and turn your home into a work of art. Here's a selection of her pro tips.

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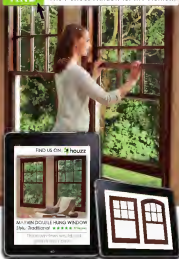
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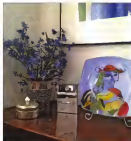
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Go crazy for containers.

Cowan uses wooden crates as short bookshelves and end tables, and she stacks them in her kitchen counter to create shelving. "There's even a half wall made of boxes in her screened-in porch."

"One, it didn't feel easy, and two, I was concerned about the cat scratching [the screen]," Cowan says of her porch. "But I couldn't afford to build a half wall... This is simple because it's perfect storage, and I can take it down in the winter. And I can rearrange it. I'm all about adaptability."

Throughout her home, colorful decorative boxes hold knickknacks, small decorative boxes line her shelves, and large chests double as tables and storage units.

Cowan's advice for keeping track of the container's contents? "Try labeling them with blackboard tape and a gold sharpie."

Improvise and economize.

Look closely at Cowan's plaid living room curtains and you'll notice they're just folded fabric hung with binder clips. When you can't spend a small fortune on new curtains, a few yards of draped cloth can provide the same effect.

Her other tip for thrifty decorating? "The same way you in your friend," Cowan says, and she suggests watching for sales at Hugs & Bunches and Jo-Ann Fabric and Craft stores in South Burlington.

Add twinkle.

The first thing you notice walking into Cowan's house is the light. Her walls are stark white—the perfect backdrop for collections of photographs, paintings and books. But regardless of wall color, this inventive decorator has a few handy tricks for bringing light into any room.

Cowan recommends experimenting with strategically placed Christmas string lights, mirrors and clay chimes. Pay particular attention to dark corners and low coffee tables, which can recede into the shadows.

Limit the color palette.

"A variety of colors will harmonize if they're in the same color family," Cowan says. Consider her bed, with its breezy arrangement of mismatched, blue-patterned pillows, and blue and white polka-dot duvet. Even though the prints are different sizes and patterns, a common palette unifies them.

Edit, edit, edit—and reorganize.

You don't need to spend a hundred of money redecorating to make your house feel special, Cowan says you will feel better about your home if you simply take the time to declutter and organize the treasures you already have.

While you're at it, "Switch things up," she adds. "Move the furniture around. Rearrange the things on your tables. Put some things away for a while. It's surprising how this can sometimes change our emotional outlook, as well!"



1. Stacked crates offer additional counter-top shelving.
2. Cowan made her own budget-friendly pattern using binder clips and discount fabric.
3. A half wall of wooden crates holds bins and books.

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